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President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Jarbussynova (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 36 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/470, A/57/621)

Draft resolutions (A/57/L.44, A/57/L.45)

Mr. Nguyen Thanh Chau (Viet Nam): There is hardly an issue that has attracted more attention by the United Nations and the international community than the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Year after year at this forum, we have debated the same topics — the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine — while the region is gradually turning into a powder keg. Punctuated by several bloody wars and successive flare-ups of armed conflict, followed by Israel's occupation of the lands legitimately belonging to the Palestinian Arabs, it has become a constant serious concern of the international community. Violence breeds the desire for vengeance, and the vicious circle thus thrives. Hatred spills across national borders, and the love-thy-neighbour spirit is lost forever in this holy part of the world.

No one benefits from this precarious situation. For Israel and other neighbouring countries, it must be an uneasy feeling of insecurity; but for the Palestinians, it is the feeling of being denied their inalienable rights for so long, including the right to self-determination and to establishment of the statehood they deserve. And the world community suffers, too. The recent killing of a United Nations relief worker in Jenin camp is just additional solid testimony to this painful fact.

Sheer force of arms cannot solve the problem. The only option to this conflict is to peacefully negotiate a solution that caters for the legitimate interests of all parties concerned. This makes the peace process all the more important and urgent.

This year, the Security Council adopted resolutions 1397 (2002), 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002), which are relevant to this question, while a number of debates and discussions continued at other United Nations forums since the last United Nations General Assembly session. It is deeply regrettable, however, that the situation in the Middle East remains dangerously explosive, and the prospect of peace is drifting away.

The miserable plight of the Palestinians is a direct consequence of the acts of war and occupation by Israeli forces. It is deeply rooted in a political issue. These people suffer every time there is trouble in the region. For the last 50 years, millions of Palestinians have become refugees on their own land, struggling hard to make both ends meet. In addition, prolonged military curfews and strict travel restrictions by Israel gravely affect the normal lives of these people. The

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international community has tried its best to deliver assistance.

In this connection, we commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its painstaking efforts to help the Palestinian people, even with its very tight budget. We also commend donor countries, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other bodies for their generous contributions which help ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Viet Nam's position is crystal clear on this issue and is lucidly contained in a message by the President of Viet Nam, His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian people, 29 November. He said:

"Together with the international community, Viet Nam wishes to express its grave concern over the ongoing escalation of violence in the Middle East, especially when the Palestinian National Authority and the international community are trying to work out a peaceful solution to the conflict. More than ever before, Viet Nam calls upon all parties concerned to do their best to push forward with the peace process and implement fully the signed agreements, especially those accords achieved at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit and the Mitchell Plan, in order to find, as soon as possible, a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, putting an end to these acts of violence. Such a solution must ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. including the right to self-determination, the return of refugees and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, as well as the rights of all parties concerned, on the basis of the land for peace principle and of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) of the Security Council and other signed agreements."

The story of Samson and Delilah told of a young couple's love across the dividing line, laced with betrayal and manoeuvres, which resulted in destruction and death. Let us just take it as a legend. Let the international community and all parties concerned in this conflict join in good faith in concerted efforts to ensure that the modern Samson and Delilah can live happily ever after in peace and harmony.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The debate on agenda item 36, on the situation in the Middle East, comes at an extremely critical moment, in the absence of any current negotiations in the search for peace amid an unprecedented spiral of violence. There are no signs anywhere of the possibility of beginning a constructive and serious dialogue leading to a just and lasting peace that would benefit, first, all peoples of the region and, thus, all humankind.

The ongoing deadly cycle of violence and reprisals has exacerbated political tensions and has caused an unprecedented number of dead and wounded in recent months, most of them innocent civilians, including a considerable number of children. To them, we must add the tens of thousands of families mourning the loss of their loved ones and living in precarious conditions, constantly threatened with death and destruction. That road cannot lead anywhere. Violence, destruction and the use of military force can in no way lead to a definitive resolution of the conflict.

Fifty-five years ago, the Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which recognized the partition and the creation of two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish, which were to coexist in peace and harmony. More than half a century later, the situation is still bleak. The State of Israel was created in 1948, but the creation of the State of Palestine remains a just aspiration that is yet to be realized.

The scene before us today is cause for despair. Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese Arab territories are still occupied by Israel, in flagrant violation of the numerous resolutions of the Assembly and the Security Council that request the immediate return of those territories. The Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and to the creation of their own independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, are yet to be respected.

Despite the demands of the international community that Israel halt the establishment of new settlements and the confiscation of lands, Israeli settlements continue to expand, especially in the occupied West Bank, including the outskirts of East Jerusalem. That illegal practice violating international law must be halted immediately.

There is still no definitive solution to the situation of the approximately 4 million Palestinian refugees both in and outside the occupied territories. This is one of the issues on which no progress could be

made during the peace-process negotiations begun in Madrid more than a decade ago.

The United Nations is faced with one of the most difficult of tasks, and one which has dragged on virtually since the Organization's foundation. It is regrettable that the Security Council is hostage to the dictates of a Power that uses its veto or the threat of the veto to prevent the implementation of the Council's own resolutions. In fulfilling the Council's obligations, double standards must be forever eliminated if the Council wishes to preserve its credibility.

As the Secretary-General notes in his observations in his report (A/57/621), the idea behind the preambular section of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) of 12 March 2002, which supports the existence in the Middle East of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, is vital for sustainable peace in the region.

Now, what has actually been done since March to put an end to all acts of violence? It is painful to recognize that hardly anything has been done. Has any step been taken to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories? Why could a United Nations fact-finding mission not be sent to assess on the ground the events of last April in the Jenin refugee camp, despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1405 (2002) of 19 April 2002, which welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in that respect? Everyone here knows the answers to those questions.

As is universally recognized, a definitive and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is fundamental to achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, while not neglecting the necessary progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the issue.

Israel must end its occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights and the areas of southern Lebanon that remain under the control of the Israeli army. All Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Middle East must be fully complied with, without exception or discrimination, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

We must proceed to the adoption of more effective measures on the ground, such as the deployment of an international force, under United Nations mandate, to protect the civilian Palestinian population. Moreover, the United Nations must play an effective and genuinely impartial role in any negotiating process that is undertaken, without any interference deemed unacceptable to the parties, so that they can recover their confidence in the mediators.

In those efforts for peace — as necessary as they are urgent — the international community can rely, as always, on Cuba's constructive contribution and its firm support and solidarity. In that regard, my delegation calls on the Assembly to vote in favour of the two draft resolutions submitted under this item, which stress that the road towards peace in the Middle East is one of understanding and not one of confrontation.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Several days ago, we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The many messages of sympathy conveyed on that occasion to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reflected eloquently the international community's ongoing interest in the thorny question of the Middle East — an interest particularly revived by the current context, which is marked by a paroxysm of violence.

My country, Burkina Faso, is following closely and with concern the alarming development of the situation, in which the stumbling block — apart from the general problem — is unquestionably the occupation of Palestinian lands. In fact, the Israeli policy of systematic colonization of Palestinian territories and of expropriation and even banishment of their populations is the principal cause of this persistent tension, punctuated daily by suicide bombings, military raids and repressive acts of all kinds. All of that has resulted in an enormous loss of human life, in material damage and in the destruction of neighbourhoods and houses, among other things. What is most deplorable is that most of the victims are children.

It is far from our intention to condemn anyone, but we must recognize that Israel, by weakening the Palestinian Authority, by subjecting the occupied territories to its legislation and by desecrating holy places, is antagonizing organizations that have no other

choice but to express themselves through violence. Israel's abusive use of force and the legitimate reaction to it have led to many arrests and even to extrajudicial killings.

Thus, the conflict in the Middle East is entering its fifty-fourth year — 1948 to 2002 — without real hope for a solution or for lasting peace on the horizon. But the fact that we find ourselves in an impasse does not mean that we should utterly despair. Indeed, many diplomatic initiatives are currently under way that could provide a chance for a resumption of the political process, the precondition being, of course, that acts of violence cease. The protagonists must agree to a ceasefire and must commit to signing a *modus vivendi* that rules out any act of violence during the period of the resumption of negotiations.

With regard to solutions that should be emphasized, first and foremost is the Saudi plan, or the Abdullah plan, unanimously adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at the Beirut Summit, held on 27 March 2002. What does the plan recommend? It recommends the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of normal relations with Israel on the basis of a peace treaty, in exchange for Israel's return of territories that it occupied in 1967 and its acceptance of the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. After all, that principle — of land for peace — has already been endorsed by the international community in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference in 1991, approved by the European Union and very recently reaffirmed again by Council resolution 1397 (2002).

Upon careful analysis, the plan is an honourable solution, because it takes the desires of the parties into account and is widely supported by the international community. Moreover, the Security Council has fundamentally changed in its approach to the Middle East. In fact, it now supports the idea of two States — Israel and an independent Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and harmony. Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that the question has inspired individual as well as collective initiatives, such as the Tenet plan, the Mitchell report and, more recently, the peace plan of the Quartet — comprising the United States, Europe, the United Nations and Russia — whose ambition is to create a Palestinian State in 2005, with Israel's support and headed by the current President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, who would allow a certain number of institutional reforms. We think those are opportunities to seize without any further delay.

The advent of peace — a lasting peace — in the Middle East requires acceptance of an agreement entered into freely by the two parties on an equal basis. The protagonists of the Middle East have no choice but to negotiate, because more than 50 years of war, confrontation and violence have transpired there without leading to any kind of victory. In any case, the final solution will not come from military supremacy. History has taught us many times that a people's will and resistance to injustice always triumph over military force. The only remaining alternative, therefore, is to negotiate peace — the peace of the brave — on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Mr. Mbanefo (Nigeria): The situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine would seem to be one of the most intractable problems on the agenda of the United Nations. It is a matter of regret that this situation persists despite the efforts on the part of the international community, as well as our collective good will, to end the cycle of violence in that region, which has continued to escalate, defying all efforts for a genuine and sustainable peace. The escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in recent times is a matter of great concern. It is condemnable, and should not be allowed to continue a day longer.

The various military incursions by Israel — including Operation Defensive Shield and incursions into Bethlehem, Jenin and Nablus — and the deliberate humiliation and isolation of the Palestinian leader are as deplorable as the spate of suicide-bombing attacks on schools, markets and other public places carried out against Israel by certain Palestinian elements. All of those actions are clear violations of the Madrid and Oslo accords. The international community cannot, and should not, allow that wanton destruction of lives and property to continue.

Nigeria believes that a just and lasting solution to the thorny question of Palestine must be the basis for the establishment of sustainable peace in the region. It must also be consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Consequently, Nigeria joins others in demanding the withdrawal of Israel from Palestine territory occupied since 1967. We also call for respect for the right of all

States in the region to live in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Nigeria is committed to a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict, and therefore calls upon the parties to resume the peace process and move towards lasting peace in the region. My delegation firmly believes that no progress is likely to be attained until the core issues central to the Middle East crisis are addressed. Those include the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, violence, terrorism and the economic situation in Palestine. Consequently, Nigeria calls on the General Assembly to address the security concerns of the State of Israel as well as the political aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Nigeria is deeply concerned that the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan continue to live under foreign occupation. My delegation therefore considers the continued existence and expansion of settlements in the Golan and the reluctance to guarantee the security of the parties to be a major stumbling block to peace. We call on the parties concerned to adopt flexible policies and to resume peace negotiations on the principle of land for peace, which, in our opinion, will guarantee long-term peace and security in the region.

In that respect, Nigeria supports General Assembly resolutions 56/31 and 56/32, both of 3 December 2001, on the issues of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, respectively. We also support Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 478 (1980).

My delegation notes from the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that peace was maintained in the Israel-Syria sector. However, the situation remains tense and we continue to be apprehensive about the impact of the presence of landmines on UNDOF personnel and innocent civilians living in the area.

On the issue of Lebanon, my delegation notes that while there has been some progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) following Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the situation there remains unstable. The disturbing developments along the Blue Line of withdrawal between Israel and Lebanon, including mortar and rocket attacks from southern Lebanon across the Blue Line, has the potential to threaten regional peace and security. My delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that no party should violate the Blue Line.

It is our belief that the situation in the Middle East calls for compromise by all the parties concerned, as reiterated pursuant to Security Council resolution 338 (1973). Nigeria will continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General in favour of the presence of UNDOF in the region. We also welcome the agreement between Syria and Israel in that regard.

Nigeria supports the call by the Secretary-General for the establishment of a third-party mechanism to quell violence and foster progress on the volatile issue of the Middle East. We also endorse the idea of holding an international conference, as proposed by the United States Secretary of State after the meeting of the Quartet comprised of the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations that was held in Washington, D.C., on 2 May 2002. My delegation will continue to support all multilateral initiatives aimed at a speedy return of the parties to peace negotiations. Nigeria calls on the Quartet, regional partners and other sponsors of the peace process to ensure timely resumption of the peace process, pursuant to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

My delegation reiterates our support for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Equally, we support the vision of two States: the State of Israel living within secure and recognized borders and an independent and viable Palestine, both living side by side in peace and security, as affirmed by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). Nigeria commends the speech made by the President of the United States of America on 24 June 2002 on the question of a road map towards establishing a Palestinian State within three years. We call upon the parties involved to heed that advice, abandon violence and pursue the peace process.

My delegation wishes to reiterate the commitment of Nigeria to the ultimate goal of a negotiated peace between Israel and Lebanon, on the one hand, and Israel and Syria, on the other, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the initiative of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which was endorsed at the Summit of the League of Arab States held on 28 March 2002; the Madrid meetings of 17 and 18 July 2001; and the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, Nigeria commends the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and the Personal Representative of the Secretary General to southern Lebanon, on the coordination of the work of the United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people and Lebanon, respectively. My delegation also commends the men and women who have served, and are serving, with UNDOF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their courage and commitment to the cause of international peace and security.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Since the start of the intifada more than 1,800 Palestinians and more than 600 Israelis have been killed in the Middle East. Innocent civilians, including many children, die regularly in terrorist attacks and military operations. A United Nations officer was recently shot and killed. The violence shows no signs of stopping, yet the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are scarcely communicating, let alone negotiating a peaceful settlement.

There is a need for urgent and concerted external initiatives. Norway therefore supports the work of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Russian Federation on an ambitious road map for peace in the Middle East by 2005. If it is followed, such a road map, supported by a strong and well-functioning monitoring mechanism, could lead the traumatized Israeli and Palestinian peoples to a comprehensive and lasting peace based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and previous agreements. To succeed, the road map will require the full cooperation of both sides.

While Israel has the right to defend itself against terrorism, we nonetheless call on Israel to stop the heavy military operations in densely populated areas, which often result in civilian casualties. We call on Israel to stop extrajudicial killings, to ease curfews and closures and to facilitate the resumption of economic and social activities in the Palestinian area. We particularly urge Israel to stop its settlement activities on occupied land. These continuing activities are eroding Palestinian trust and undermining the prospects for progress under the Quartet road map.

At the same time, we call on the Palestinian Authority to take an unequivocal stand against terrorism and to fight it vigorously by building a consensus in Palestinian society against such activity. We say to all Palestinian factions and groups engaged in terrorism that their methods have achieved nothing but misery and grief. Their actions are destroying the moral and economic foundation of a future Palestinian State. They must stop killing innocent civilians, disarm and engage in a democratic political process.

The violence has serious consequences for the humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has deteriorated to alarming levels. The Palestinian Authority is effectively bankrupt. Public services have partly collapsed. Poverty is spreading fast. These developments are breeding resentment and feeding terrorism. This is not in Israel's interest. Thus, for the sake of its own security, Israel should without delay disburse the taxes that have been withheld from the budget of the Palestinian Authority.

In the present very difficult circumstances, Norway remains committed to its role as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. An Ad Hoc Liaison Committee donor meeting should be organized as soon as possible to address these urgent issues. Timely action by the donor community will be an indispensable complement to the efforts of the Quartet to get the peace process back on track.

The destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are inseparable. Security for the Israelis depends on security for the Palestinians, and vice versa. Peace can be achieved only through mutual compromise. The road to peace may be arduous and painful, but both parties must now join the international community in recognizing that the best way to end this tragic conflict is to work with determination towards the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders by 2005.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation in the Middle East remains one of the priority items on the agenda of the General Assembly. Unfortunately, we must note that, with regard to the turbulent developments in the region, the past year was marked by an unprecedented crisis in relations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The efforts made have not yet been able to break the

vicious cycle of violence, terrorist acts and forcible retribution, the victims of which are civilians on both sides. As a result, mutual distrust and despair are growing and the prospects for a resumption of the peace dialogue are deteriorating. Despite the assistance of international organizations and donor countries, the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories has assumed catastrophic dimensions.

Against this backdrop, the Russian Federation calls on both sides not to succumb to extremist provocation or to allow violent confrontation to be exacerbated. Violence cannot be justified by any motive. It only claims further victims, perpetuates crises and does irreparable damage to the interests of the Palestinian people and to the prospects for the achievement of their national aspirations. Russia, which is facing the manifestations of an ongoing terrorist war being waged against it, decisively condemns the activities of all those who have chosen terror as a means of achieving their own aims.

We welcome the steps taken by the leaders of the Palestinian National Authority to identify the organizers of terrorist acts and to suppress their activities. We believe that, despite the difficulties, the Palestinian authorities should continue decisively to combat the terrorist infrastructure.

Tangible results, however, can be achieved only if the Israeli leadership exercises restraint and stops attacking Palestinian towns and refugee camps and reoccupying the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority. It is essential that the economic blockade of the territories be lifted, that financial revenues owed to the Palestinians be released, and that unimpeded access to all Palestinian areas be given to international humanitarian organizations. It is absolutely unacceptable that the property of organizations that assist the Palestinians be damaged. In this respect, we share the concern of the Secretary-General over the activities of Israeli troops who, on 2 December, destroyed a warehouse of the World Food Programme in Gaza. Unless Israel fulfils its obligations, we cannot hope for successful Palestinian reforms. Of course, there must be an immediate halt to Israeli settlement in the occupied territories.

The leaders of Israel and the Palestinian national administration must assume their lofty political responsibilities and do their utmost to resume the negotiating process in order to achieve mutually acceptable solutions on the basis of the road map elaborated by the international mediators of the Quartet.

The Russian delegation reaffirms the legitimate right of the Palestinians to establish their independent State and the right of Israel to secure and peaceful existence within internationally recognized borders, as established in Security Council 1397 (2002). To that end, we call on the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to cooperate closely with the international mediators and other actors in order to achieve a peaceful settlement on the basis of the two-State concept. The Arab peace initiative launched at the summit of the League of Arab States in Beirut, is consonant with those efforts.

The Russian Federation reaffirms that a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). To achieve such a peace the Israelis and the Palestinians must resolve the key problems during the negotiating process. But genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible unless normal relations are established between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. As a co-sponsor of the peace process and an active participant in the Quartet of international facilitators, Russia will vigorously continue its efforts in this area to seek to overcome the crisis and to bring about a comprehensive Middle East settlement.

Mr. Manis (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express our thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report on the situation in the Middle East (A/56/470). It is also my pleasure, Madam, to see you presiding over this important meeting.

My delegation attaches the utmost importance to developments in the Middle East peace process because they have clear repercussions for issues of international peace and security. Tragic events in the region caused by violations perpetrated by the Israeli army, the widening spiral of violence, Israel's arrogance and its flouting of the principles international legitimacy and fundamental human rights all warn of further complications and tension in the Middle East region.

The practices of the Israeli occupation Government, its policies of killing, destroying, closures, the demolition of homes and infrastructure, the State terrorism vis-à-vis the unarmed Palestinian

people and the blocking of needed humanitarian assistance have all increased security tensions. They have heightened feelings of bitterness among the Palestinians and have led to an escalation of all kinds of legitimate resistance to regain their stolen rights. Violence, as we all know, breeds more violence.

Israeli forces have occupied Arab lands in the Syrian Golan since 1967. The occupying Power continues to seize land from Arab Syrian citizens, preventing them from using their agricultural resources, from drilling artesian wells and from building water reservoirs. Israeli occupation forces use various means of intimidation, humiliation and torture against the population in contravention of the resolutions of international legitimacy adopted by the Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council. Those acts violate the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments.

Israel must be compelled to withdraw fully from the Arab lands it has occupied since 4 June 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farms, in implementation of the principle of land for peace and relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, in particular General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

The continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan is a grave obstacle to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East region. It is further essential to call on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners and Lebanese and Syrian detainees held in Israeli jails.

The most important duty of this Organization, in the light of the growing military arsenal used by Israel to perpetrate its crimes in the region, is to disarm Israel of its nuclear weapons, as it is the sole nuclear Power in the region. The elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East would surely achieve the necessary military equilibrium, which would in turn achieve stability.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since the end of the Second World War, the Middle East region has undergone a series of wars and acts of destruction as a result of an Israeli policy which is based on occupation, settlement and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. The United Nations has made many efforts to achieve a just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and has adopted hundreds of resolutions. Israel, however, has refused to implement those resolutions, in defiance of the will of the international community. Israel thus continues its occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanese territory. We need not provide a detailed description of the daily acts of aggression and the violations perpetrated by Israel. The world sees, hears and reads every day about new Israeli crimes in the region. The way out of this dilemma lies in the implementation by Israel of the resolutions of international legality.

Just and comprehensive peace in our region can be achieved only through the implementation of the resolutions of international legality, which call for Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967. They also call for ensuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to the establishment of their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

While all the State of the region have acceded to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Israeli continues to refuse to do so. It has kept its nuclear programmes outside the scope of international supervision, which constitutes a grave threat to the security and stability of the region. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls today, more than ever before, for strenous and serious efforts to be made to render our region free of weapons of mass destruction. My Government is gravely concerned about Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rejects the policy of double standards that exempts Israel from nuclear disarmament efforts, thus encouraging an arms race in the region.

The international community has committed itself to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. It is the duty of all Members States in our region to commit themselves to the implementation of resolutions of international legality. Proceeding from such duty, my Government has welcomed the return of international inspectors to Iraq, and it calls upon the Iraqi Government to fulfil the requirements of Security

Council resolutions in order to spare the regime the scourge of war.

Mr. Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been worsening for more than two years. It continues to deteriorate in the light of the security policies that Israel continues to employ against the Palestinian leadership and people. Illegal Israeli practices, including around-the-clock curfews in Palestinian cities, closures and restriction on the freedom of movement, have resulted in what started as an economic crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories but has now deteriorated into a humanitarian emergency of grave concern.

Israeli policies are based on targeted killings, arbitrary detention and arrests, the targeting of civilians in the Palestinian territories, destruction of their houses and stripping of their land, in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and the continued construction of additional settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. These policies, resulting in the deterioration of the situation and increased pain and suffering of the Palestinian people, have been condemned internationally and have proven ineffective. They are by no means the way to exit from the crisis and will not put an end to violence. Nor do these policies support the international efforts being deployed to resume the political process and return to the track of peace.

Therefore, we call upon Israel to put an end to its occupation of all Palestinian cities without delay and to withdraw from the Palestinian cities re-occupied since September 2000, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1435 (2002), and to put an end to the closures and blockades of these cities. We also call upon Israel to refrain from its exclusionary security practices and to adopt more positive policies aimed at restoring confidence and trust between the two sides. Accordingly, Israel should begin by paying the tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, an amount that exceeds $700 million, in order to alleviate the economic difficulties that the Palestinian Authority faces and to enable the Authority to provide the necessary services to Palestinian society. We call on Israel to cooperate in facilitating access of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and to provide free passage and movement to personnel of international humanitarian organizations inside the occupied Palestinian territories.

The violence that Israel is practising in the occupied Palestinian territories has become a main source of frustration and desperation among the Palestinian people. It contributes directly to strengthening the role of extremist organizations on both sides — organizations that seek to destroy whatever remains of the peace process. The main reason for the violence in the Palestinian territories is the continued Israeli occupation of those territories for more than 35 years and the pursuit of settlement activities there throughout that entire period.

I wish to stress once again my Government's position which condemns the killing of innocent civilians, be they Palestinians killed by the Israeli occupation forces or Israeli civilians killed in suicide bombings carried out in Israel.

The only way to end the Arab-Israeli conflict is through the resumption of the political process on the basis of the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, which emphasize full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, namely, all Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In that context, I also wish to emphasize the importance of the commitment of all United Nations Members to the implementation of Security Council resolutions without discrimination. Those resolutions are binding on all Members. Article 25 of the Charter states that the Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions — for example, the resolutions of the Security Council — in accordance with the Charter. Thus, Article 25 does not distinguish between Security Council resolutions under Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the Charter.

The peace process should be resumed on the basis of a clear road map that identifies the obligations of both sides — the Palestinians and the Israelis — with a specific timetable leading to the establishment, within three years' time, of an independent Palestinian State in the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, and in conjunction with the vision of the President of the United States, George Bush, of the establishment of two States living side by side in peace. We hope that the road map crowning the efforts of the Quartet will

be finalized, issued on the proposed date this month and implemented after it has been adopted by all concerned parties.

This road map should be comprehensive, addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It should also include a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that begins with the first stage of the implementation process. It should be dealt with as an indivisible package in terms of accepting or rejecting its elements.

We call upon Israel to deal seriously and positively with international efforts aimed at issuing the road map. That calls for Israel's acceptance of the road map, once issued, and Israel's active participation in its implementation, according to a specific timetable set for every stage of its implementation.

On this note, I wish to stress the true and serious Arab commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, as presented in the Arab Peace Initiative adopted collectively during the Beirut Summit. The initiative was clear and balanced, without a doubt. All Arab States will collectively sign a peace treaty with Israel in return for the following: first, Israel's full and prior withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories up to the lines of 4 June 1967; secondly the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital; thirdly, reaching an agreed and just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions. This initiative is also in agreement with the vision and commitment expressed by United States President George Bush, and with what the final status agreement on the Palestinian-Israeli track should look like.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my Government's position regarding the Palestinian refugees hosted by Jordan, numbering about 1.7 million and registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Jordan has suffered economic and financial burdens for over 50 years by hosting these refugees and displaced persons, which has depleted Jordan's developmental and environmental resources to a great extent — greater than any of the countries that host or donate to refugees.

The Government of Jordan has spent approximately $403 million in 2002 on educational services, health, infrastructure and social welfare for the Palestinian refugees. Currently, the Government is working on improving living conditions in the 13 camps for Palestinian refugees in the Kingdom. It also covers any additional costs resulting from UNRWA's inability to fulfil all of its services at any point due to budgetary constraints. Thus, I wish to stress that UNRWA should continue to operate in the region until a final agreement on the Palestinian refugee problem is reached and its various aspects are completely settled. I also wish to express my Government's gratitude and appreciation to all donor States who continue to support UNRWA's budget.

The continuous Israeli settlement activity is obstructing international efforts to put the peace process back on track and is undermining efforts aimed at achieving progress in terms of cooperation between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the rebuilding of trust and confidence. Furthermore, Israeli settlement policies are a flagrant violation of international law and are contradictory to the principle of land for peace. We thus call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity in the Palestinian occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and to put an end to the aggressive and provocative actions carried out by Israeli settlers against defenceless Palestinians.

As for East Jerusalem, it is an occupied Arab territory. It has been occupied since 1967 and is subject to the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), which rejects all Israeli measures aimed at altering the demographic nature and legal status of the city. Accordingly, we wish to re-emphasize that Israel and any body — governmental or non-governmental — must fully adhere to and comply with these resolutions. Jerusalem is of great spiritual and religious value to the followers of the three monotheistic faiths and should always remain a city open to all and a symbol of peace in the Middle East.

We in Jordan find ourselves caught in a cycle of escalating violence that is holding back economic and social progress in the region, both because of the crisis we are witnessing on our western borders with the Palestinian territories and Israel, and because of the economic sanctions imposed on the people of Iraq on our eastern borders. These difficult conditions threaten the stability of the region in terms of both security and the economy.

We look forward to the day when the peoples of the region will live in peace, stability and security, far

from the killing and violence, far from occupation, poverty, frustration and desperation.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the last year, the situation in the Middle East has continued to deteriorate dramatically. As a result of the spiral of violence, vengeance and reprisal that began in September 2000, almost 2,000 Palestinians and more than 600 Israelis have been killed, and thousands more from both communities injured.

As a consequence of terrorist acts, killings of innocent civilians, reoccupation of Palestinian territories, settlement activities, extrajudicial killings, humiliating treatment of civilians, closures and curfews and the destruction of economic infrastructure and homes, the resentment and tension between Israelis and Palestinians have reached alarming levels.

The parties directly involved in this conflict do not seem to realize that this conflict does not and will never have a military solution or, much less, a solution imposed by terrorism. We regret that, in spite of the repeated calls of the international community, the vicious circle of confrontation leading nowhere continues unabated, without end.

Two reports issued recently by important non-governmental human-rights organizations contain disturbing findings and conclusions. In one report, Amnesty International describes some of the acts of the Israeli forces in the Jenin refugee camp and in the city of Nablus in the context of the Operation Defensive Shield and concludes that they meet the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the other hand, Human Rights Watch asserts that suicide bombings perpetrated by Palestinian groups against Israeli civilians are also war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Under international law, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have clear security, humanitarian and human-rights obligations. The aforementioned reports and the relevant documents published by the United Nations clearly demonstrate that both sides have violated these obligations.

Israel should abide by the provisions of humanitarian international law, in particular those of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides for protection against wilful killings, torture, humiliating or degrading treatment, deportations, acts of collective punishment or reprisals and appropriation or destruction of property. All violations of these provisions should cease immediately.

Argentina believes that Israel has the right to live in security, to protect itself and to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks. However, those rights should be pursued in conformity with law. As the Secretary-General said, self-defence is not a blank cheque, and responding to terrorism in no way exonerates Israel from its obligations.

Likewise, Israel must take immediate action to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories by implementing the recommendations of the Bertini report.

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, is obliged to refrain from carrying out attacks against Israeli civilians and has the responsibility of protecting those civilians from terrorist bombing attacks originating in areas under its security control. It has been demonstrated that terrorism has not vanquished Israel. Rather, it has increased the determination of the Israeli Government to eradicate terrorism.

The Argentine Republic reiterates its strenuous condemnation of terrorist attacks against innocent civilians. We join others in condemning the recent attacks carried out in Kenya and in the Israeli city of Beit She'an. My country has also suffered the scourge of terrorism. In the 1990s, there were two bombing attacks in our country, one against the Embassy of Israel and the other against AMIA, a Jewish benefit society, in which more than 100 people were killed or injured. In addition, Argentine citizens residing in Israel have been killed in two bombing attacks perpetrated this year in that country. We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the families of all victims of those attacks, and we strenuously call for an end to such attacks.

Argentina deplores the death on 22 November 2002 of Mr. Iain Hook, an employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The unfortunate incident can be added to the list of other such incidents occurring in the occupied territories in the past year that affected United Nations workers.

Under international humanitarian law, there is an obligation to ensure the security and protection of all humanitarian personnel and United Nations and

associated personnel. There is no justification for the violation of those basic norms. Through various initiatives, Argentina has repeatedly expressed its concern for the security of personnel. In February 2000, when presiding over the Security Council, my country convened an open debate, chaired by the Argentine Minister for Foreign Affairs, which concluded with the adoption of the presidential statement of 9 February 2000.

The tragic events I have just described indicate the urgent need for the parties to resume a process leading back to the negotiating table. Argentina strongly supports the initiatives of the Quartet to that end and agrees that progress should be made simultaneously in the political, economic, humanitarian and security tracks. To make progress on only one aspect without addressing the others would not contribute to the stability of the region and would undermine chances of creating a climate of mutual trust.

In that context, my country believes that the road map prepared by the Quartet can provide the basis for the resumption of a peace process that would lead to the realization of the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians to their real independence and personal dignity, including the establishment of an independent and democratic State, and to the legitimate right of Israel to recognition and security. We call on the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work actively with the Quartet to implement that plan.

The only option in the Middle East is peace — a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and other existing agreements between the parties. To this end, progress should be made in all tracks of the peace process so as to realize the aspiration of achieving peace, not only between Israel and the Palestinian Authority but also between Israel and Lebanon and between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In southern Lebanon, the conduct of the parties should be guided by the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). In the current circumstances, the utmost restraint and self-control should be exercised, while respecting the Blue Line established by the United Nations and refraining from carrying out or tolerating acts of provocation that can increase tension along the Blue Line. In accordance with the request of the Security Council, the Lebanese Government should continue to consolidate its authority in the southern part of the country, and Israel should respect the territorial integrity of Lebanon.

With respect to the Golan Heights, my country would like to reiterate once again that the acquisition of territory by force is unacceptable. Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) set out the path that the parties should follow: the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Syrian Golan occupied in 1967 and respect for, and acknowledgement of, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all States in the area and of their right to live in peace within secure and unthreatened borders. We call upon Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to negotiate in good faith on the basis of the aforementioned resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Argentina calls on the parties, with the assistance of the Quartet and other countries of the international community, to abandon the logic of confrontation and to embark on the path of compromise and mutual concessions in order to realize the much desired aspiration that all peoples in the Middle East should live side by side in harmony and peace.

Mr. Neil (Jamaica): The annual debate on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine is an occasion that reminds us of the historic responsibility of the United Nations with regard to these questions, which over the years have had such a painful history. The past year has been one particularly full of violence and tragedy. The pattern of attack and retaliation in a continuous cycle of reprisals has become so frequent and familiar in recent times that there is danger of the acceptance of violent conflict as the norm and as an inevitable feature of the Middle East situation. What is also worrisome is the posture of detachment and inaction on the part of the world community. That cannot be good for the image of the United Nations with respect to the fulfilment of its responsibilities concerning an issue of great importance for world peace.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The current breakdown in the peace process and the re-emergence of confrontational attitudes and policies are part of the scene of a continuing human

tragedy of bloodshed and destruction. A climate of distrust and mutual hostility is generating more and more violence, which is taking a heavy toll on the lives of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Most distressing of all is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the area: the shootings and military excesses of the Israeli occupation forces, the destruction of homes and property, the economic deprivation, the misery and the impoverishment, which are all part of this continuing pattern of deterioration. Those distressing conditions are the results of hard-line policies that emphasize military solutions, which only help to provoke further conflict. The shift towards confrontation is disheartening with regard to the prospects for dialogue and negotiations, and it is now more essential than ever that the international community persevere in its efforts to revive the peace process.

Jamaica claims no special expertise in dissecting the complex issues in the Middle East situation, nor are we in a position to exercise any significant leverage on the parties. We simply want to join the moderate voices calling for peace. We do so out of concern for the victims of a continuing human tragedy and out of a sense of duty as a Member of the United Nations body that has a collective responsibility to fulfil. We do not in any way underestimate the difficulty or the complexity of the issues, but Jamaica continues to believe that peace is possible and necessary and that it requires perseverance and continuous active efforts. It is clear to us that, while it is up to the parties to shoulder the responsibility to make peace, it is not realistic to leave it only up to them to take the initiative. They are not able to do it by themselves. It requires intervention and mediation from the international community to exert influence on the parties and to provide the proper framework and the mechanisms for peace negotiations.

What is needed now is a greater sense of urgency, more active efforts by sponsors of the peace process from all sides and, especially, a more active role on the part of the United Nations itself. The Security Council should be doing more. In the face of the grave situation and its continuing deterioration, there is a need for more active consideration of the issue and for greater urgency in the promotion of diplomatic initiatives. The United Nations has a central role to play, and the Security Council — as the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — has that special responsibility under the Charter. We need to see that responsibility being discharged in implementing the principles of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) through the sponsorship of a peace conference, which needs to be actively pursued.

So much has happened, and so much time has been lost, but the world community should not abandon what has been started. A decade ago at the Madrid Conference, the peace process began with the acceptance of the principle of land for peace, incorporated into the ensuing Oslo Accords. Jamaica shared the optimism of the international community that we had embarked on a process that was leading to a final settlement. Regrettably, that process was stalled in the unfolding political changes in the Middle East, and some momentum was lost.

However, our view is that the process that has been started should not be discarded and that it is still a basis on which peace can be built. A number of initiatives and proposals are available that contain the basic guidelines on which peace can be negotiated. The Oslo Accords, the principles of the Tenet ceasefire plan, the Mitchell report recommendations and the Saudi Arabian peace plan adopted by the League of Arab States provide the principles and a substantive basis for a negotiated settlement of the issues. What is needed now is a political initiative from within the international community to move the process forward and to bring the parties to negotiations without preconditions.

Jamaica continues to believe that settlement of the question of Palestine is a critical issue. It is now widely accepted that the right of Palestinians to live in dignity in an independent State in Palestine must be an indispensable part of any settlement. Peace must have justice, and justice demands that the Palestinians be accorded the rights to which they are entitled and the right to an end to the haunting tragedy of indignity and deprivation.

Secondly, it is time for the occupation to end, along with the illegal establishment of settlements in the occupied territories. The prolonged occupation by Israel has intensified grievances and has provoked anger, bitterness, frustration and despair. If the Palestinian people are not offered any hope, and if their elected leaders are subjected to disrespect and

humiliation, there can be no real prospect for a durable peace.

Finally, there should be an acknowledgement of the right of all States in the area to exist in peace and security within recognized boundaries. That includes the acceptance of the State of Israel's right to security as a State in the region and to safety for its citizens. It goes without saying that Israel should also respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours, in accordance with the principles of international law. The only route to achieving those objectives is through peaceful negotiations. Violence cannot bring justice for the Palestinians, nor can military domination and subjugation of the Palestinian people bring security for Israel. Those are the lessons learned from the past decades of conflict.

Jamaica's call is, therefore, for peace negotiations. War and military force are not the answer. We condemn violence of all kinds against civilians, whether they are Israelis or Palestinians. Suicide bombings must be rejected. Equally, all attempts to impose a military solution through military subjugation and suppression of the Palestinian people should be rejected. The only way forward is through compromise and an accommodation between the Israelis and Palestinians based on the peace process begun in Madrid. Until that goal is reached, there is a need for restraint and for a cessation of further acts of violence on both sides.

In that context, it is important that all operations in the occupied territories be conducted within the framework of international legality, especially those provided for in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Every possible influence should be exerted to avoid the drift towards extremist positions, which promote confrontation and armed conflict. What we need now is support for moderation, the reduction of tension and the encouragement of compromise and mutual accommodation from both Israel and the Palestinians. Coexistence is the only way. That is the lesson that history has taught us.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This year, the General Assembly is debating the two items on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine amid very telling and critical regional and international reports that the region is enduring a horrific escalation of Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and their infrastructure.

The Madrid peace process was launched 11 years ago. Year after year — indeed, month by month and day by day — it is losing momentum. It is clear to all those devoted to peace within and beyond our region that Israel's continuing occupation of Arab lands, which it sometimes justifies under the pretext of its security needs and sometimes by various false claims, is the main obstacle on the path to peace. The peace process has been halted on all tracks, particularly in recent years following the accession to power of extremist Governments in Israel. These Governments have prepared their country, in theory and in practice, for the prevailing conditions on the ground. They insist on occupying Arab land and on rejecting international legality. They refuse to implement relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and reject the principle of land for peace.

Syria's serious negotiations over the years have unmasked Israel's intentions. Israel is not serious about achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on relevant Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, it is Syria's inalienable right to regain, without barter, all of the occupied Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967. That right has been reaffirmed in all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights was accompanied by the promulgation of legislation, measures and other ways and means to empty the land of its people, to establish all necessary conditions for the building of settlements on occupied Arab lands and to bring in settlers from all parts of the world to replace the Arab inhabitants. This is a violation of all international instruments and resolutions. Israel has demolished urban centres and appropriated, expropriated or destroyed the water, agricultural and livestock resources of the Syrian Arab inhabitants of the Golan. Furthermore, it has contributed to the deterioration of the environment by uprooting trees and disposing of chemical wastes in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

Among the most important consequences of occupation is the issue of the approximately 500,000 displaced Syrians ejected by Israel from the occupied Golan in 1967. These people are still waiting to return to their lands and to their homes, and yet the number of Israeli settlers in the Golan is growing. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to expand settlements,

which now number about 40, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

These policies and actions have evoked astonishment, denunciation and strong condemnation. Israel's leaders are well aware that occupation, oppression and injustice cannot prevail and continue. They know that the Golan is an indivisible part of Syria and that it will return to the motherland, however long it may take and regardless of the military might of the occupying Power. They know above all that the Israeli policy of occupation is the only such policy being implemented in contemporary political reality.

Last year saw ever more barbaric acts being committed against the defenceless Palestinian people. The occupying forces have a record of considerable criminal activity that has led to the deaths of 2,000 martyrs and the injury of thousands upon thousands of Palestinians since the beginning of the intifada. Israeli activities in the towns and villages of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are quite simply ugly massacres, in the full meaning of the word. They are crimes of genocide. Palestinian children, women and elderly are being killed by Israeli military aircraft, tanks and rockets, as affirmed in paragraph 5 of the Economic and Social Council's report in document A/57/63.

In this regard, I note that the report issued a few days ago by Amnesty International affirmed that Israeli activities in the reoccupation of the West Bank and the incursions in Jenin and Nablus are war crimes. Furthermore, paragraphs 22, 23 and 24 of the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of 24 April 2002 refer to the use by the Israel Defence Forces of Palestinian civilians as human shields. In this vein, I would also cite the statement made by Paul Grossrieder, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the effect that the Israeli army has used no fewer than eight Red Crescent medical staff members as human shields. It is also worth noting that Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in a press statement released by the United Nations Information Service on 5 April 2002, stated that there had been

> "entry into homes, house after house, destruction of what is in the houses, often destruction of the houses ... The situation [in the camps] is really unprecedented ... It is quite appalling to see... how some installations, for instance in the health and medical area, have been destroyed and medicines smashed".

Israeli practices have even included threats against the lives and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, many of whom have been killed. The latest casualty is the British national Iain John Hook, the senior manager of UNRWA's Jenin camp reconstruction project. A large part of that camp has been burned to the ground under repeated Israeli assaults.

Israel has exploited in the ugliest possible way the umbrella of the international coalition against terrorism, terrorism that we all deplore, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001. It is combating the just Palestinian cause on the pretext of fighting terrorism. Israel continues to attempt to eradicate resistance to occupation. Palestinian resistance is self-defence — defence of land and dignity — but Israel classifies it as terrorism. By so doing, Israel contravenes international instruments, moral values and the principles of international law. Israel is attempting to cover up its war of extermination against the Palestinian people.

Israeli contempt for international legitimacy deserves the denunciation and anger of international public opinion, particularly after the Israeli Government refused to accept a fact-finding mission to investigate the massacre perpetrated in the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees. It claims that its crimes against the Palestinian people are self-defence, a war against terrorism. At the same time, Israel resorts to the ugliest forms of terrorism on the pretext of fighting terrorism. For many years, Syria has called on the international community to condemn all forms of terrorism, particularly State terrorism, as practiced by Israel in its highest form.

The phenomenon of terrorism was unknown in our region until the creation of Israel in 1948. Since then, Israel has become deft at practicing terrorism to entrench its occupation of Arab lands and to commit massacres with impunity. To rid themselves of despair and frustration the Palestinian people now have no alternative to the intifada to free their land and regain their dignity. The criminal war waged by Israel against the Palestinian people is not self-defence, as Israel portrays it to the world, but rather a war waged to defend and perpetuate occupation, to manufacture and

distort facts and tug on the heartstrings of some States in an attempt to legitimize occupation, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and resolutions of international legality.

Peace contradicts occupation. Peace cannot be reconciled with the brutal force used by Israel. Since the end of the Second World War and until today, our region has witnessed a series of wars and acts of destruction because of an Israeli pattern of behaviour based on occupation, settlement and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Palestinians from their homes and their homeland. The United Nations has made many efforts to reach a just settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hundreds of resolutions have been adopted in that regard, but Israel has refused to implement them, flagrantly defying the will of the international community. It has perpetuated its occupation of the Golan, the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Lebanese territory. No measure has been taken under Chapter VII of the Charter against that occupying Power. The Arab States unanimously adopted a peace initiative at the Beirut Summit of the League of Arab States last March that paves the way for comprehensive peace. This is an initiative born of the region; it takes into account the comprehensive nature of peace. However, Israel responded to that peace initiative by killing it, through incursions into Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps in the West Bank. And today, as we speak, there are incursions into Gaza.

Israel also defies all of the international community's efforts towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The international community must realize that peace cannot be made at the expense of continued occupation of the lands of peoples and of a continued policy of killing, destruction, starving and crowding Palestinians in detention camps. This leads to the question of how the security that Israel wants can be obtained with all these continuing factors in the occupied territories. How can security be obtained in the absence of a just and comprehensive peace in the region?

The road to peace is now crystal clear to all in the Middle East — indeed, to all in the world. The implementation of the relevant resolutions of international legality, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace are the instrument. The peace initiative of the Beirut Summit is the most viable and appropriate path for the region because it is of the region. The implementation of that comprehensive initiative would achieve peace and security in the region.

The international community assembled here at the United Nations must bring all kinds of pressure to bear to ensure the implementation of the will of the United Nations and international legality without selectivity or double standards. It is impossible for us to understand why Chapter VII of the Charter is selectively invoked against many States that violate international legality and that violate the Charter in various crises while it is not applied to Israel, which has shown contempt for all relevant United Nations resolutions and resolutions of international legality. Does this not damage the credibility of United Nations resolutions?

In conclusion, allow me to appeal to the representatives of States Members of the United Nations to vote in favour of the draft resolutions before them under agenda items 35, "Question of Palestine", and 36, "The situation in the Middle East". Those draft resolutions are a call to the international conscience to bring pressure to bear on Israel to abide by the resolutions of international legality. A vote for the draft resolutions is a contribution to just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region. It is also a contribution to combating State terrorism and the Israeli policy of occupation and to forcing Israel to cease that occupation.

Mr. Maquieira (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since we have been meeting in this Hall to consider this item, we have witnessed an unprecedented spiral of violence and aggression in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. The violence has taken an irreparable toll on innocent human lives, mainly civilians on both sides, many of them children, women and elderly people.

We note with concern that the efforts of the international community to renew security cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians have thus far not borne fruit. Because of its direct effects, we regret Israel's lack of cooperation in implementing General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on this item. That diminishes the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations and weakens its role under the Charter as the guarantor of international peace and

security. It also affects the national dignity of all Members of the Organization. Along with the ongoing terrorist violence in Israeli territory, that has brought the peace process in the Middle East, a process that Chile has supported since it began in Madrid and Oslo, to a standstill.

The deterioration of the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories and the increased restrictions against the Palestinian civilian population have had a negative impact on the economy and the humanitarian situation of that population, who are the main victims of the conflict. Israel, for its part, is experiencing its worst economic recession since 1953. Consequently, and in view of that tragic reality, we are dismayed at those on both sides who insist on diminishing the opportunities for a political solution, pronouncing the Oslo accords dead.

The struggle for human dignity to prevail over abuse and violations is based on unconditional respect for the basic principle of the inviolability of life, the acceptance of different opinions, mutual respect and the correct use of words. Words can promote peace or instigate violence and instability. We, therefore, cannot ignore the echo of other decisive voices: the voices of those who can see beyond the limitations of the present and have succeeded in scaling the wall that has separated Palestinians and Israelis from a peace process that was and remains real and that should continue along the same path. We, therefore, make a clear and explicit appeal to the parties involved in the conflict to cease all acts of violence and to return without delay to negotiations in the context of the peace process that the international community has offered for that purpose.

My country recognizes the right of Israel to live within secure borders, protected from acts of terror. We reject the Palestinian suicide attacks, whose bombs have inflicted deep wounds on Israeli society. Those acts, and any other criminal terrorist acts, are morally unacceptable. Nevertheless, the right to which Israel is entitled must be exercised in accordance with international law. The excessive or disproportionate use of force and the attendant violations of human rights and humanitarian law are not justifiable. Israel must safeguard the security of its citizens without violating the rights of Palestinians.

My country rejects particularly the extrajudicial killings, the military attacks, the use of particularly destructive weapons in areas with dense concentrations of civilians, arbitrary or extended detentions, forced deportations and collective punishment. Such acts leave consequences that are difficult to repair and, worse still, engender hate of the occupier.

In that context, and in keeping with our support for the Mitchell report and with our repeated appeals for an unconditional end to violence, Chile is concerned by the Israeli Government's persistence in maintaining its policy of building new settlements, whose existence suffocates and humiliates the Palestinian population. The settlements and the roads that separate Palestinian communities and deprive them of farmland have fragmented both the land and the population and have set the peace process back.

My country supports the efforts of the Quartet and endorses its proposal for a three-pronged approach to dealing comprehensively with economic, political and security concerns. We urge it to continue to steer the process in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution negotiated between the parties and based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and on the core principle of land for peace.

We look forward to the prompt resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, under the umbrella of international legitimacy and in keeping with commitments made.

Chile will spare no effort to assist the international community to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The challenges are enormous. Peace is not only the absence of war; it is the readiness to establish conditions that are characterized by equity and justice.

Achieving that objective inevitably requires a definitive solution to the Palestinian problem, the cornerstone of the conflict in the region. Violence is unacceptable, and the occupation must end and give way to peaceful coexistence between two independent States, two peoples living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): The situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of deep concern for Ukraine. For yet another year the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have not been able to break the vicious circle of violence and terror that contradicts the

true aspirations of both peoples and that every day brings more death and destruction and breeds more hatred and desperation. Of particular concern are the increasing human suffering and loss of life among innocent Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations, as well as the deteriorating humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinians.

On many occasions, Ukraine has stated its condemnation and utter rejection of terrorism. Such despicable acts must be fought with the greatest determination. We call on the Palestinian Authority to take all measures within its power to prevent terrorist attacks against Israelis, including suicide bombings, and to bring those responsible to justice. Terrorist activities contravene and further complicate the fulfilment of the legitimate aspiration to a Palestinian State.

The legitimate right of Israel to defend its citizens from acts of terror cannot justify the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force and extrajudicial killings that often include innocent Palestinian civilians among their victims and the excessive destruction of private and public property, including institutions of the Palestinian Authority. Adequate security for Israel and its people cannot be ensured solely with military force. We call on Israel to withdraw its forces to the positions held prior to September 2000, to lift the blockade of the territories, to stop the collective punishment of the Palestinian population and to halt settlement activities. Immediate efforts should also be made by the international community to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, as well as towards the resumption of normal daily activity in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is obvious that there is no military solution to the conflict. It is only through peaceful dialogue and a political process between the parties that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be found. Therefore, we urge the parties for the sake of their peoples to cease all acts of violence against each other and to commence negotiations on the establishment of the Palestinian State, including on an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories and on finding solutions to the issues of borders, the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem and refugees.

The basis of negotiations is well known and widely accepted by the international community. It is Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, and the previously signed agreements. The final goal of the negotiations is also clear. It is the realization of the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In that context, we fully support the ongoing efforts of the Quartet, the countries of the region and other important international players aimed at finalizing a phased road map to bring this vision to fruition in three years. Considering the current circumstances of the conflict and in the region, the international community, with the United Nations at the forefront, should neither relax its attention nor weaken its efforts to advance the peace process. We look forward with hope to the forthcoming meeting of the Quartet, when the road map is expected to be agreed, and we call on both parties to respond positively to that plan. We fully understand that accepting this road will require painful compromises and hard decisions by their leaders. But we also do recognize that the alternative would be continued bloodshed and even further delay in the prospects for a peaceful solution.

Ukraine stands ready to continue to assist the parties to achieve peace. In that context, let me recall the Ukrainian proposals in the framework of international diplomatic efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict (*see A/57/69, annex*), put forward by the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, last April, and which envisage a range of parallel steps in political, security and economic spheres. It is to be noted that Ukraine's suggestion that it could provide a venue and the necessary conditions on its territory for holding peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians remains valid.

I am also glad to confirm the readiness of Ukraine to host, next year in Kiev, a United Nations international meeting in support of Middle East peace. Such a meeting would help to promote international support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A comprehensive Middle East settlement will be impossible without the resumption of peace negotiations on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian

tracks aimed at ending the occupation of Arab territories and at normalization of relations with Israel. In this regard, we recall the importance of the Arab peace initiative adopted last March at the Arab League Summit in Beirut. We encourage the Lebanese and Israeli parties to engage in dialogue on all issues outstanding following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line. We also call on all the parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint, to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation and to ensure full respect for the Blue Line. A diplomatic resolution of the dispute over the Wazzani springs water project should also be found in order to reduce the level of tension.

Ukraine contributes an engineering battalion to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL); it is performing de-mining in South Lebanon and helps in this way to return normal life to the area. My country stands ready to expand its contribution to these efforts by engaging its industrial and technological potential in the rebuilding and reconstruction of this country.

I would like to express the hope that, through the joint efforts of the parties concerned and the international community, the Middle East will become a region all of whose peoples live in the peace, security, prosperity and dignity to which they aspire, and which they deserve.

Mr. Ivanou (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We note with regret that the Middle East peace process is still beset by the serious consequences of the events of 28 September 2000 in East Jerusalem. Acts of violence continue unabated in the region; innocent civilians continue to die; and the socio-economic infrastructure continues to be destroyed.

Sliding further down this vicious slope of violence could forever deprive current and future generations of Arabs and Israelis of the chance to live peacefully and to work together in their ancestral land. The only solution to this tragic situation is through the embodiment of deeds of the political will of both parties to achieve peace and concord for the sake of the thousands of lives sacrificed in the half-century-old confrontation.

The Republic of Belarus is pained at the continuing bloodshed that, again and again, prevents normalization of the situation in the Middle East. Like all members of the world community, Belarus is determined to do everything it can to bring about a speedy settlement of the conflict. We decisively reject all forms of armed violence and terrorism in the region, and we would like once again to proclaim our unchanging commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on mutual recognition by the independent States of Palestine and Israel and on the principle of land for peace.

Peace in the Middle East will be impossible unless the Palestinian people exercise their historic right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. Peace is also impossible without peaceful coexistence of Palestinian and Israeli States within secure and internationally recognized borders.

That understanding served as the basis of the plan of the Quartet, which undertook the difficult and vitally important role of collective mediator in reconciling the parties. That was the vision reflected in the initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit in March 2002. We sincerely hope that the coordinated efforts and initiatives of the international community will ultimately lead to a resumption of the peace process in order to attain a final political settlement.

The prospects for stabilization of the situation in the Middle East are now truly threatened by developments surrounding Iraq. The President and the Government of Belarus are convinced that the artificial heightening of tension and the use of force-based scenarios in seeking to resolve the Iraqi question will have catastrophic consequences for the whole region. We have no right to allow a new war to occur in the Middle East. It would undo the many years of peace efforts undertaken by interested parties.

In that connection, Belarus once again proclaims its commitment to the abiding responsibility of the United Nations, and primarily that of the Security Council, for the peaceful settlement of the Iraqi and Arab-Israeli crises in all of their aspects.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize once again our conviction that attaining a political settlement in the Middle East is indispensable to guarantee a peaceful future for the cradle of three world religions.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker on my list for the discussion of item 36.

I regret to announce that I will be obliged to adjourn the meeting well before 6 p.m. due to the lack of speakers ready to speak at this meeting. I would remind representatives that consideration of this item had been planned for weeks; therefore, distinguished delegates had plenty of time to prepare their statements.

I still have 13 speakers on my list for tomorrow morning to continue this discussion. We will continue tomorrow, Tuesday, at 10 a.m.

Programme of Work

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I would like to make an announcement regarding the programme of the work of the plenary of the General Assembly. On Wednesday, 11 December 2002, in the morning, the General Assembly will consider agenda item 19 on the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as well as the report of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.